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ABSTRACT

A case study was conducted at a small Catholic college attempting to change the cultural environment for people who identify themselves as different from the white, Catholic, middle class, heterosexual norm represented on the campus. Thirty members of the college faculty, students, and administration and staff were selected through stratified purposeful sampling to participate in semistructured interviews. Two additional participants, openly "out" homosexual students, were selected as elite participants for more detailed interviews. Findings suggest that, overall, there is a sense of caution regarding sexual orientation in this Catholic community, with the acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transvestite (LGBT) stemming from a social justice perspective. The social justice approach to nondiscrimination and eliminating the oppression of LGBT people fits the campus culture and environment. Interview findings indicate that LGBT faculty, staff, and students experience a relatively peaceful interconnection of religion and sexual orientation. Efforts by the administration to support various types of diversity initiatives have been accepted, and change in the college culture is occurring. (Contains 14 references.) (SLD)

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UNDERSTANDING INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Understanding Interconnections Between Cultural Differences:

A Social Justice Imperative for Educational Administrators

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Statement of the Purpose and Rationale

As we embark upon the new millennium one expects that college and university campuses are welcoming, comfortable environments for all people, regardless of their race, gender, religion, socioeconomic class, ability, ethnic background, age, or sexual orientation. As society becomes more comfortable and/or tolerant with some visible forms of difference, attention shifts to the more invisible forms of difference such as religion or sexual orientation. The interconnections of religion and sexual orientation pose an interesting struggle at times because of strong cultural norms and beliefs held by many religions regarding non-heterosexual identification and behavior. The struggle between and among forms of difference can create conflict within an organization resulting in relationships exemplified through power and domination. These conflicts often arise as attempts to move an organization toward multicultural development progresses. This paper focuses on one aspect of a much larger case study. It turns to the following questions: Does sexual orientation interconnect with other facets of an individual's multiperspective identity? If so, how are those interconnections manifested on a small, Catholic college? If not, why? These questions are then related to the practice of educational administration, in that as administrators begin to understand the interconnections between cultural differences, this understanding and appreciation of interconnecting differences can lead to a social justice imperative in educational administrative practice.

This paper presents results from a case study of a small, Catholic college

attempting to change the status quo of their cultural environment for people who identify themselves as different from the white, Catholic, middle class, heterosexual norm represented on this campus. While the literature base has developed significantly in the last twenty years with regard to issues in multiculturalism, especially those involving sexual orientation, the knowledge base is incomplete due to the lack of studies that review the initiatives and recommendations that have been made on behalf of oppressed groups and determine if those initiatives and recommendations are indeed accomplishing what they set out to do. Multiperspective identity theory (Besant, 1999; Hicks, 1998; Metzger, 1998; Shapiro, Sewell, DuCette, 1995) was explored in the literature to understand the concepts of difference and the existence of subcultures and contracultures within the larger "culture" of an institution.

Critical postmodernists thrive on conflict which strengthens the community since it invites dialogue (Keith, 1996; Tierney, 1993). Shapiro, Sewell, and DuCette (1995) describe the interconnectedness of difference to explore the plurality of differences and how the roles each facet or lens connected to those differences formulate the culture of an organization. The critical postmodern framework supports the celebration and affirmation of the unique perspectives of each individual's identity, addressing the multiplicity of voices in a cultural unity under study. While sexual orientation is the major category of difference in this study, under a critical postmodern framework, one cannot view a category of difference in isolation. As one explores the multicultural

organizational climate with regard to sexual orientation, interconnections with other forms of difference emerge to provide testimony to the complex nature of one's multiperspective identity.

While organizational development seeks to understand change efforts in an organization, it utilizes a rational and empirical approach that usually measures change on a linear path. Multicultural organizational development takes into consideration that changes can come from grassroots efforts, often creating a non-linear path toward change. Multicultural organizational change addresses social diversity and social justice for all people, regardless of how they identify themselves. It also considers the interaction of groups of people and how and when oppression ensues. Understanding the interaction of forms of difference and how the emergence of multiperspective identity awareness affects all constituency members contributes to the further development of critical postmodernism as a theoretical framework in educational administration. While this study is centered in the realm of postsecondary education, the theoretical framework lends itself to the K-12 environment as well as the world of business.

Data Sources and Methods

Stake (1994) suggests that case studies are not a methodological choice but a choice of object to be studied. Intrinsic case studies are used to obtain specific understanding of a specific case. Instrumental case studies are examined to more fully understand issues or theories represented by a case. This study

addresses both. Findings of a large-scale Diversity Survey conducted in 1998 were troubling to the community members at Merciful Heart College (a small, Catholic college located in a semi-rural area in a Mid-Atlantic state). The findings of that survey indicated that providing any type of awareness/sensitivity workshops or programs regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) people would worsen the climate considerably. The same held true for most other forms of difference addressed in that survey. Love (1998) suggested that one should study the layers of culture to see how they reinforce or intensify each other. Taking Love's suggestion to task, a case study of Merciful Heart College was undertaken to determine if changes they were attempting to make to modify the cultural climate of this campus were taking hold.

Thirty members of the college faculty, students and administration/staff constituency groups were selected through stratified, purposeful sampling to participate in semi-structured interviews. Two additional participants were selected as elite participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Elite informants are selected to participate in a study because of their expertise in the areas under consideration. In this case, the two elite informants were two openly "out" homosexual students. In addition to the interviews, documents such as committee minutes, the Statement of Non-Discrimination, policy statements, campus publications, emails, and local newspaper accounts, along with a subjectivity audit (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) were used to triangulate findings presented in the interviews. Videos of the campus, which captured the location of artifacts, also

supported triangulation efforts.

Information obtained from the interviews comprised the bulk of the data collected for this study. Constituents were asked a variety of questions about the campus in general, the mission of the college, identity differences, the campus climate towards diversity in general and specifically regarding sexual orientation, interrelationships of difference, and diversity and LGBT initiatives. In addition, specific questions were asked about leadership on campus to better ascertain the role of leaders and leadership in multicultural change efforts.

Typological analysis of the data was accomplished using a framework gleaned from the literature. Analysis using a multicultural organizational change process became a composite of the work of Tierney's (1994) frameworks of leadership, structure, decision-making, finance, and socialization; combined with Beaudry and Davis' (1997) dimensions of a multicultural climate, and Schwerner's (1997) checklist of strategies to assess the multiperspective identity process of change. A matrix was developed and used to facilitate the disaggregation of the data.

Tierney's (1994) frameworks were the starting points of analysis of the data. Separate sections were available for each of Tierney's frameworks: Leadership, structure, decision-making, finance, and socialization on each data disaggregation matrix. As data were entered onto the form in the appropriate framework, analysis was completed to address the Beaudry and Davis (1997) categories for the evaluation of a multicultural climate. Beaudry and Davis

incorporated the 1992 work of Hagans, Crohn, Walkush, and Nelson into their evaluation strategy which included the following areas:

- Infusion – is the improvement accepted within components of the existing system?
- Pervasive – does the improvement spread throughout the entire system?
- Potent – does the improvement have the power to visibly demonstrate the desired processes and outcomes?
- Coherence – is there increased close coupling between systems impacted by the change efforts along with stronger relationships between and among components?
- Sustainable – do the components become a part of and improve the culture and climate of the system?
- Multicultural – does the proposed improvement focus on the social agenda addressing gender, culture, ethnicity and social class; is it explicit in accepting inclusion and respectful of diversity?
- Reflective and transformative – how can we determine if efforts were successful?

Once the data were analyzed for the correct Tierney framework and Beaudry and Davis category, a checklist of strategies offered by Schwerner (1997) was employed to help assess the multiperspective identity process of change. These strategies are:

- Members of multicultural organizations should become difference-

cognizant; individuals are encouraged to keep their identities visible.

- Individuals within the organization should become aware of where their identities align under the oppressed/oppressor status of the organization.
- The collective identity of any group within the organization is fostered within the organizational culture to forge long-term commitment of the constituents.
- Individual needs for autonomy should not be seen as divisive or promoting separatism. It should be allowed to foster a safe environment for all, and used as a means of promoting the safety of the organizational climate. Members should be free to join the cultural organization as full participants when they are ready.
- As the organization embraces different cultural traditions, it demonstrates a commitment to difference and values the participation of all members.
- The concept of "allies" is critical to the reduction and elimination of oppression within the organization. As members who do not share in the same forms of difference as other members of the community visibly show support for those members, powerful coalitions are forged.
- Constituents must begin to act together to help create a collective identity within the organization. Joining together to combat a common cause will help groups work together for the betterment of the organization.
- Community building events and the development of bonds between people will help the individual members feel as though they are one in the

organization and part of a community of people with common goals, values and norms.

Findings

Overall, there appears to be a caution regarding sexual orientation in this Catholic community, with the acceptance for LGBT people stemming from a social justice perspective. Since the Church does not promote the sexual activity of any unmarried couple, heterosexual or LGBT, and that teaching is followed on this campus, the social justice approach to non-discrimination and eliminating the oppression of LGBT people fits on this campus. The LGBT members who were interviewed for this study, whether they are openly "out" or not, concur that this perspective at least acknowledges their presence and affirms their identity. The fact that a retreat was designed by the Campus Ministry team to address the spirituality of LGBT members documents the Infusion (Beaudry & Davis, 1997) of their efforts, in addition to exemplifying the Potency, Coherence, and Sustainability (Beaudry & Davis, 1997) of their efforts to accept, acknowledge, and affirm the LGBT members within the teachings established for all Catholics. This demonstrates a comfortable interconnection of difference on this campus. Leaders need to understand the intricacies of these interconnections in order to encourage the further movement of multicultural organizational change efforts. However, it is essential that all constituents on campus, but especially leaders, understand the facets of their multiperspective identity so that they can see

relationships they have with others first before attempting to gauge the interconnections and relationships between other people on campus.

Leadership has clearly been demonstrated at Merciful Heart College with regard to both general diversity efforts and efforts aimed toward the LGBT population. The work of the Alliance Against Homoprejudice Committee was a grassroots effort that was led by the Dean of Students. While the Dean of Students does hold a formal leadership position, and the Dean did create the Alliance Against Homoprejudice Committee, her purpose was to move the question of the silence of homosexual people on this campus into the constituency. This applies to Beaudry and Davis' (1997) Multicultural category of focusing the social agenda on multiperspective areas and attempting to create a climate that is accepting of people who are in this case, non-heterosexual, and also attempts to create an environment that is respectful of diversity in general. Within this Beaudry and Davis Multicultural category, Schwerner's (1997) assessment criteria of members becoming difference cognizant is fulfilled. A traditionally silenced group (LGBT people) are encouraged to keep their identities visible though the work of the Alliance. Individuals in this committee also became aware of oppressed/oppressor statuses on campus and took their findings to the community.

Schwerner (1997) indicates that the individual needs should not be seen as divisive which was demonstrated in that the Alliance Against Homoprejudice Committee sought to keep the Catholic identity in the forefront of their work,

choosing to work from a social justice perspective and in concert with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Since the institution does not promote the sexual activity of unmarried persons, regardless of their sexual orientation, the institution felt comfortable addressing homosexuality form the oppressed/oppressor status. In their work as a group, the Alliance Against Homoprejudice Committee acknowledged and affirmed other religious viewpoints regarding homosexuality issues on campus to help create an environment that permitted people to peacefully profess their beliefs. The Alliance Against Homoprejudice Committee encouraged the institution to become more inclusive in their language to create a welcoming environment for LGBT people. This group was instrumental in changing the Non-Discrimination Statement on campus to include sexual orientation, a substantial step for a Roman Catholic institution. Through planning campus wide educational events, they attempted to create bonds between people in order to begin to create an environment where people would feel free to gather together. The promotion of an LGBT social event, an LGBT spirituality retreat, Ally triangle safe zones, and changes to the non-discrimination statement of the institution are all evidence that the institution is creating a welcome environment for LGBT people.

The current President of Merciful Heart College has demonstrated strong leadership by making diversity efforts a primary goal in his agenda, while enabling members of the constituency to consider and develop ways for these diversity efforts to occur. Calling a Presidential Diversity Task Force, supporting

the work of the Alliance Against Homoprejudice, and naming a Special Assistant to the President for Diversity are all indicative of what Beaudry and Davis (1997) call Potent and Sustainable Efforts. All of these efforts had the power to make change possible at Merciful Heart College, and all were sustainable in that they contributed to an improvement in the climate and the culture. When asked about the leadership of change efforts on campus, participants indicated that while general diversity efforts were initiated by formal leaders on the campus, such as the President, the support for sexual orientation initiatives resided in both formal and informal leadership channels. While many participants agreed that there was formal leadership, such as the Dean of Students in a primary role, and other administrators including the President and Vice President for Academic Affairs in more supportive roles, the real work of sexual orientation initiatives were accomplished by the members of the Alliance Against Homoprejudice Committee and the current members of the Ally group on campus. While the Dean of Students is an Ally at Merciful Heart, other members of the administration and staff comprise the current Ally leadership. Leadership rotates among members in the Ally organization. While there are formal chairpersons of the Ally group, there are subcommittees that take leadership in fund raising and activity planning efforts. This is a grassroots coalition at its best, change efforts emerging from the constituency instead of being initiated in a top-down capacity. All of Schwerner's (1997) criteria are found in this category and demonstrated in a positive way.

Conclusions

The interconnection of religion and sexual orientation is assumed in this investigation because the institution studied is a Roman Catholic college. It appears to be a relatively peaceful interconnection for LGBT faculty, staff, and students. LGBT faculty and staff interviewed in this study generally feel welcomed and affirmed at Merciful Heart College by the administration, other faculty, and staff members. Although faculty and professional staff are cautious in revealing their sexual orientation to students, some have joined the Ally organization that has been established on campus to provide support and affirmation to LGBT people on campus. This may appear to be a contradiction, but before the Ally group was formed on campus, none of the LGBT faculty or professional staff who were interviewed were "out". It is only since the formation of this group and efforts on campus that faculty and professional staff felt some comfort in expressing their sexual orientation.

LGBT faculty and staff are comfortable with the Catholic identity of the institution and feel the work of the Alliance Against Homoprejudice group and the Ally group is grounded in the mission of the college. The Alliance Against Homoprejudice group was a precursor to the Ally group. The Alliance Against Homoprejudice group was actually a committee called together by the Dean of Students to address homophobia and the lack of students, faculty, and staff members who were "out" on this campus. The mission of the college, grounded in the tenets of mercy, service, justice, and hospitality appears to support the

notion that all are welcome on this campus. Merciful Heart College appears to understand that the norms of the culture are exemplified through the mission of the organization and strives to continue that mission through diversity and LGBT initiatives.

Other invisible forms of difference like religion, hidden disability, and social class, besides sexual orientation, all seem to create feelings of discomfort for constituents on this campus because of the strong Catholic, middle class history of the institution. As more non-Catholics, people of lower and upper socioeconomic classes, and differing abilities are represented on campus this alienation should dissipate. While not an invisible form of difference, students with physical disabilities were virtually ignored for many years on this campus. An example of the ability for groups to become less alienated on this campus can be described by efforts to make the campus more inclusive for physically challenged students. Several years ago there was one young woman who used a wheelchair on campus. She was a commuting student. The campus was difficult for her to navigate and she relied on the assistance of others to simply get to class or to the library. Many physical improvements were made on campus to accommodate wheelchair bound members. Housing options for resident students became available as well as improved sidewalks and ramps, elevators and wheelchair carriers in stairwells. Within the current President's first year of office, he chose to navigate the campus in a wheelchair with members of the American's with Disabilities Compliance Committee to see how difficult it would

be for a person who is bound to a wheelchair. This resulted in the above mentioned changes and the subsequent choice of several wheelchair bound students to attend Merciful Heart College. These students are active members of the community participating in activities of the college such as swim team, peer counseling program, Eucharistic Ministers and Lectors, tutoring, among others.

Diversity efforts, in-general, have been addressed concurrently with sexual orientation initiatives at Merciful Heart College. This concurrent strategy has helped sexual orientation initiatives at the college as diversity programming tends to focus on and acknowledge the multiperspective identity of campus members. The creation of the Special Assistant to the President for Diversity administrative position has helped both general diversity efforts and sexual orientation initiatives on campus. The changing of the non-discrimination statement to include sexual orientation and the issuance of a campus Diversity Statement promote the multiperspective identities of campus members. Helping to be more inclusive instead of exclusionary of sexual orientation are strong messages for a Catholic institution. The assumed interaction between sexual orientation and religion has been addressed openly from the interaction with the local Bishop from the very beginning of the Alliance Against Homoprejudice Committee work, to the development of a special religious retreat for LGBT students. Merciful Heart is aware of oppressed/oppressor relationships between forms of difference and has made progress in reducing those oppressive relationships through programs and activities designed to educate students, faculty, and staff on differences in general

and specifically toward LGBT issues. These relationships are indicative of multicultural organizational change, one example being the general acceptance of the Ally triangle as a symbol of safe space for LGBT people.

The work at Merciful Heart College regarding its acknowledgment of sexual orientation as a facet of one's multiperspective identity that needs to be recognized and affirmed is encouraging to those researchers involved in research for social justice issues. The implications for educational administration of this study are really contained within the concept of multiperspectival social theory (Best & Kellner, 1991). Multiperspectival social theory permits the analysis of society or culture through multiple perspectives or views of reality. Before administrators begin to address issues of diversity in education, self-reflection regarding their own perspectives of cultural diversity is essential (Shapiro, Sewell, & DuCette, 1995) in order to determine which lenses are present and which are missing. Understanding their own perspectives of difference will help administrators to understand the different cultural perspectives that come into play in their professional decision-making processes. This self-analysis and self-awareness process will help administrators encourage members of their constituency to take initiatives in developing grassroots initiatives that will lead to change in the campus climate. The Dean of Students at Merciful Heart College played an instrumental role in facilitating the work of the Alliance Against Homoprejudice. The President on campus during the early stages of this work was comfortable in allowing this grassroots effort to continue. The succeeding

President acknowledged and affirmed the importance of grassroots efforts and pledged his support by enlarging the scope of the work of the Alliance Against Homoprejudice by engaging a Diversity Task Force that would assist in enabling the work of the Alliance Against Homoprejudice group. The Diversity Task Force was also a grassroots effort that brought ideas and suggestions to the President for his acknowledgement. By providing support and allowing the constituency to develop the work from their multiperspective lenses, the views of the constituency were addressed and affirmed. This shared power provided the leader (in this case the President) with a greater basis of support for diversity initiatives in general. The President, as an emancipatory leader took forth the suggestions of the groups and provided needed funding and administrative support to make them a reality on campus. In acknowledging one's own cultural borders, we can better understand and acknowledge the cultural realities of others and provide the opportunity for constituents to develop a voice. As these new voices emerge, the multicultural climate of an organization begins to change, moving the organization in new multi-linear directions. Change happens slowly and to one person at a time.

This success of this study may serve as encouragement for administrators to include critical theory in their practice. Asking the questions of what is, what should be, and how do we change the praxis, creates an opportunity for leaders to engage the constituency in the problems of the organization and allow the constituency to solve those problems within their sphere of influence. Having the

courage to begin the process that will lead hopefully to inclusivity or a sense of belonging, for those who have felt themselves different, is an important initial step of an emancipatory leader.

By assessing their progress toward multicultural organizational change, Merciful Heart College has courageously taken steps to become the institution members of the community have envisioned. In addressing diversity in a broad sense, and sexual orientation in a specific sense, Merciful Heart College began the self-reflection process by asking questions about those voices who were heard and those who were silent on campus. By acknowledging the silence of LGBT people, they attempted to find these voices and create a climate where LGBT people would begin to feel comfortable and empowered as full members of their community. Other institutions need to stop and determine if the changes they have made in recent years to advance the agenda of LGBT people, or in a broad sense, culturally different people have taken hold. Since this was a single case study, other studies are needed at a variety of colleges and universities to determine if emancipatory leadership is the key to successful LGBT or general diversity efforts.

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